

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 3 E

WASHINGTON TIMES
10 October 1986

Our intelligence deficiencies

RALPH DE TOLEDANO

The Senate Intelligence Committee reports that U.S. counterintelligence efforts are totally inadequate in the face of "expanding hostile intelligence operations."

This is a sour irony, since it was that same committee which, in the contorted days of the Carter administration, was responsible for crippling our intelligence services by a series of destructive hearings and imposition of rules which guaranteed their inadequacy.

Talk to any present or former member of those services, and you will find virtual unanimity on this point. The rampaging "investigations" conducted by Sen. Frank Church, then the Intelligence Committee chairman, not only destroyed morale in the FBI, the CIA, and other agencies but made it impossible for them to carry out the vital mission of apprehending spies.

Top-ranking FBI officials — Mark Felt, who had risen to second in command, and Edward Miller, who headed the domestic intelligence division — were hounded, indicted, and convicted because in the view of Mr. Church and his committee they had too zealously attempted to track down the terrorists and murderers of the Weather Underground, an organization trained and financed by Cuba's secret police.

The methods employed by the FBI in this case were no different from those that had proved effective against other terrorists, but Mr. Church was outraged that they were used against idealistic young bombers.

In confirming Judge William H. Webster as director of the FBI, the Church committee exacted tacit promises that the bureau's internal security forces would be drastically reduced — its well-trained and devoted agents assigned to such matters of high import as processing Freedom of Information Act requests.

At the same time, the Justice Department was pressured by the committee into issuing "guidelines" which neatly and disastrously tied FBI and CIA hands.

(A good case can be made that except for those "guidelines," the renegade Edward Lee Howard would not have succeeded in dodging the FBI and making a run for Mexico and the Soviet Union.)

The Senate Intelligence Committee of those days was more interested in throwing mud at the late J. Edgar Hoover, who was not there to defend himself, and to "punish" the FBI than it was in tending to the national security.

Both the FBI and the CIA were roundly admonished to comport themselves like Little Lord Fauntleroy and not to ruffle the feathers of the KGB. The tarring and feathering of skilled and dedicated men in both agencies was a by-product of this concern.

Deepening the irony, the Senate Intelligence Committee levels strong criticism at the government because it does not periodically review the security clearances of those who have access to highly classified materials.

Such security procedures once existed, but they were brutally gutted by an anti-anti-Communist Congress in the late 1950s. Since then, moves to tighten security, including those proposed by the Reagan administration, have been met by agonized howls from the media and the liberal contingent on Capitol Hill.

The current Senate Intelligence Committee does not share the zeal of its predecessor to mangle our counterintelligence services or to extend the "rights" of spies and traitors. But it lacks the historical background which would enable it to avoid placing the blame for our counterintelligence inadequacy on a lack of coordination among the services.

In its most successful days, let it be noted, the FBI was at sword's point with the CIA and looked suspiciously, and with some justification, on the security practices of the other agencies. Clearly, competitiveness was a plus factor.

The committee, moreover, misses the point when it argues that counterintelligence has fallen down because of organizational failures. The real fault rests in deeply rooted antagonisms to all counterintelligence activities, antagonisms shared by Congress, the media, and academic opinion-makers.

For reasons best left unsaid, the feeling continues that guarding the nation's security is a dirty and foolish business.

The committee is right in deploring existing inadequacies. But it would be doing a greater service if it focused on basic causes rather than searching for scapegoats.

Ralph de Toledano is a nationally syndicated columnist.